



Members of the audience enjoy the pelvis-shaking sounds of Elvis impersonator Gregor Graf.

Showing support and solidarity at the Oktoberfest

Mayors throw a party for Americans in Bad Nauheim

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The beer was flowing, the entertainment was non-stop and families had a chance to relax in a picturesque setting as local mayors staged a mini-Oktoberfest for their American neighbors in Bad Nauheim Oct. 10.

Wanting to do something for the Soldiers and families impacted by the ongoing war on terrorism, Mayors Bernd Rohde, Winfried Bayer, Heinz-Peter Haumann and Oswin Veith of Bad Nauheim, Friedberg, Giessen and Butzbach, respectively, decided to throw a free party in Bad Nauheim's Trinkkuranlage to demonstrate their continued support and long-standing appreciation for the close ties between Germans and Americans in the 284th Base Support Battalion.

"I think it was a very good idea to get together with my fellow mayors several months ago to plan how we could support the American community," said Veith. "This Oktoberfest is our way of showing solidarity with the deployed Soldiers who are in Iraq

and their spouses who remain here in our communities.

"German-American friendship in our cities of Bad Nauheim, Giessen, Butzbach and Friedberg didn't just occur overnight; it grew over the past decades," he said, adding that the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, on the United States "were an attack against the people of the free world. As time passes people forget about that, and therefore it's important to remember that the majority of the German people are behind you and support the mission you are doing. We know that when you fight in the war against terrorism it isn't just for Americans, it's for free people the world over. ... We all hope that your mission will be completed successfully, and eventually the Iraqi people will experience democratic rule."

The mayor, who recalled with fondness growing up in Butzbach, a German town where a large number of the residents were American military members, said, "We will continue to support you in any way we can."

While Germans and Americans enjoyed performances by local bands and individuals in one section of the scenic Bad Nauheim spa center, oth-



German and American guests compete in a sack race at the mini-Oktoberfest at the Bad Nauheim Trinkkuranlage Oct. 10.

ers participated in sack races, hammer contests and a host of special events for the younger set. Children played games, made souvenir buttons and enjoyed arts and crafts.

"I'm glad so many families came out for this," said Lt. Col. Bart Shreve, 284th BSB commander. "It's a good turnout. It's also great to be here in Bad Nauheim." Shreve added that German-American ties remain close in the communities of the 284th BSB,



Germans and Americans cheer on participants in one of the many traditional events at the Bad Nauheim Oktoberfest for American soldiers and their families.

puzzle game, added that members of his unit were let off for the day so that they and their families could take part in the festivities.

"Knowing there is so much support after there's been so much controversy is comforting," said Master Sgt. Ernest Coleman of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 37th Armor Regiment.

"It was not easy for us (Soldiers) to leave, because when we deployed there was so much disagreement between the United States and Germany. When you don't have the full support of the international community, you get worried. But coming back and seeing that the local communities care about our families is great. Hopefully the wives will tell their deployed husbands about this. It's important for them to know; it's one less worry for them."

"Events like this are very important," said Coleman's wife, Andrea. "Most people don't even know what kind of support is going on. ... I am glad the mayors organized this fest and many spouses accepted the chance to get out and experience German culture."

"We had the same situation dur-

ing the first Gulf War. Local companies offered tours for the spouses of deployed Soldiers, but not many were aware of it," she added. "Joint events show Americans that Germans are not their enemies as sometimes portrayed in the media."

'Special bonds'

"I try to support the Americans as much as I can because I have special bonds with them," said Elisabeth Smaczny, a German Friedberg resident who attended the Oktoberfest and said she ran a small food establishment serving Americans for several decades. "I am sending care packages downrange because in a way it's like paying back for the care packages we received after the war."

"I think this fest is very important because it provides Germans a chance to meet the families of the deployed Soldiers and to show them that we care," said Smaczny. "The friendship with the Americans in this area grew over decades. To me they (the Americans) are part of my life. I hope this event shows officials that we are friends and that they will not close the U.S. installations in this area."

"Having a joint Oktoberfest is

great," said Hilde Van Atteveld, another local German attendee. "It's always a good idea to do something to strengthen the community and to take care of each other. Oktoberfest is a Bavarian tradition, and with this event we can get our American friends accustomed to this tradition."

"My cousin is married to an American, and they were stationed in Hanau. Through them I had contact to Americans, and I was always aware of what was going on," said Van Atteveld. "They returned to the States so it's hard for me to stay in touch with the American community. But such events help us to meet American families and to show them that Germans are their friends and that they care."

"It's great for our morale," said Maritza Ramirez, a 284th BSB family member. "It's great to see that we get treated as equals in Germany. They should offer such events more often because they make a difference."

"It's wonderful that the local mayors would get together to offer their support to the Army community," said Patricia Hamilton, whose husband is deployed to Iraq with HHC, 1-37th Armor. "My daughter can do something on the economy that's for free.

It's fun for everyone, and it does not cost a fortune. I hope they'll offer more events like this in the future."

"It's also good to know that despite the war and the differences the leaders of our countries had we are still friends and the Germans are here to offer their comfort. I really feel taken care of," she said.

By the afternoon's end 40 pounds of hot dogs, scores of German wursts and pretzels, stacks of white radishes and numerous liters of beer and soft drinks were polished off.

But no German-American event in Bad Nauheim would have been complete without the mention of Bad Nauheim's most famous adopted American son. None other than Elvis, or at least his look-alike, Gregor Graf, took center stage and belted out some of the former Bad Nauheim resident's most popular songs. As the Elvis impersonator talked between spirited renderings of the King's tunes, he described how several of Presley's hits were composed during his stint as a young sergeant stationed in Friedberg while residing in the Hessen spa resort town.



Jennifer Green (left) and Kendall Cadrillono enjoy a board game in an area packed full of children's activities at the Oktoberfest.



Chaplain (1st Lt.) Jonette Meise (from right) and Mary Ann Ernst serve hot dogs, pretzels, wursts and other goodies at the Oktoberfest.

Photos by Karl Weisel



Elvis Presley impersonator Gregor Graf belts out one of the King's favorite songs in Bad Nauheim. Presley called the town home while serving with the U.S. Army in Friedberg.